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ABSTRACT

Presenting models describing a monolithic power structure, a pluralist power structure, and variations of these, this paper asserts that the monolithic power structure traditionally associated with rural areas is no longer valid for rural development. It is suggested that the following decision making mandate would serve as a better touch stone when considering leadership in rural development: "the mandate is for participation, not direction...and the message obviously not yet heard by the leaders surveyed, is that people want to be included and informed, not managed and ignored". Maintaining that "powerful is not the same as competent", this paper builds the following argument: in complex matters, nobody knows and nobody can do all that is needed; therefore, edict management is out, and since our systems today work in a way that everybody is not dependent on a few, interdependence is the key relationship; complex operations require diffuse competence, so looking for leaders may be a good deal less productive than looking for and using a variety of people with many different abilities, experiences, interests, and styles so that a system can be developed that includes all the necessary competencies; the democratic process is the best way to put together all that is needed to give good direction to development, because democracy is a good protection from the threat that some segment of society will be allowed to do the wrong things very efficiently. (JC)

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Identification of Leadership

and

Pictures of the Power Structure

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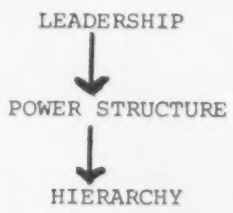
IDENTIFICATION OF LEADERSHIP

AND

PICTURES OF THE POWER STRUCTURE

One of the things that comes up early in considering how to get something going or keeping it going in rural development is the item of identifying leadership. When this term is used, it usually communicates the idea of locating people who are playing or could play the leadership roles.

Perhaps there are some prior considerations that need attention before considering who are or should be treated as "the Leaders." We need to think about our beliefs and expectations about how leadership is structured and how it works. It is fairly common for people to think of "the Leaders" as those who control the community power structure, and to think of the community power structure as organized on the basis of the principle of hierarchy. The flow of the connection of these ideas often goes something like:



There are quite a few people who believe that there is a natural connection between leadership and hierarchy, and to talk about identifying leadership means to locate the people who function in the highest levels of community power structure hierarchy. There are even agencies that base their efforts to get action in rural development on a strategy of accepting and using the existing community power hierarchy to push and support what are considered rural development projects.

Yet there are some values that need to be thought about before moving to this kind of strategy. On top of the value list, might be the value in democratic direction of rural communities. In the United States good rural development is something more than successful projects liked, supported, and advocated by people in high status or reputed power positions. What this suggests is that in American communities:

THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS OUGHT

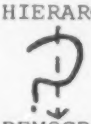
TO BE A DEMOCRATIC PROCESS.

Having projects designed and directed by a select strata of leaders identified by some agency, is not too much in keeping with the idea that in the United States ordinary people have a role to play in the development of policies and efforts at planned changes. The American people have roles beyond following the leaders and deferring to a few to make the decisions

about how things ought to change. Rural development affects just about everybody, as what happens to and in our smaller communities and countryside has a lot to do with the quality of life in every sector of our nation. Rural development is too important to be left to a few leaders or power figures, and therefore requires the work of many, identified and unidentified.

The notion of directing development through a democratic process is not a new idea in the United States, and it should not take a revolutionary effort to make it work. It might take a little re-thinking about the way we conceive of leadership and how it works. First we ought to consider whether the organizational principle of hierarchy is compatible with democracy. A little graphically, the question can be stated:

HIERARCHY



DEMOCRACY

All this is simply by way of suggesting that when it comes to identifying leadership appropriate for rural development in these United States maybe thinking of it in terms of persons manning the hierarchy of community power is not exactly what we want.

Like so many things we deal with today, perhaps we have to pay attention to questions rather than jumping to conclusions. One question you might want to consider for a while before you attempt to answer the question about identifying leadership for rural development is:

CAN YOU THINK OF LEADERSHIP IN ANY OTHER

WAY THAN A POSITION IN A HIERARCHY OF POWER?

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VIEWS OF THE POWER STRUCTURE

There are quite a few different pictures of how power and influence are structured in American communities. How you think or what you believe about the structure of power will have a lot to do with the strategies you use when you try to exert some influence in the process of rural development.

Several things might be called to mind before committing yourself to a strategy:

1. DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES MAY HAVE DIFFERENT PATTERNS OF DECISION-MAKING

2. THE SAME COMMUNITY MAY HAVE DIFFERENT PATTERNS AT DIFFERENT TIMES AND WITH DIFFERENT ISSUES

3. DIFFERENT PEOPLE, EVEN IN THE SAME COMMUNITY, MAY HAVE VERY DIFFERENT IDEAS ABOUT THE PATTERNS OF DECISION-MAKING

4. THE PATTERN (S) OF DECISION-MAKING EXISTING IN A COMMUNITY MAY BE A MAJOR PROBLEM AND AN IMPEDIMENT TO EFFECTIVE AND DEMOCRATICALLY DIRECTED RURAL DEVELOPMENT.

This all means that the truth about the way decisions are made and who makes them can only unfold in the context of actual situations in real communities at a particular point in time. There might be a temptation to say that since this is the case, there is not much point to consider the theory of community power or the patterns of influence and decision-making in the abstract. The truth, however, is that the ideas of the nature of the community power structure can have a lot to do with how people plan and act. The fact is that peoples' beliefs and premises (or their theories) about how power is exercised and decisions made and implemented is extremely important. It affects what they suggest, what they do, what they expect, and how they react to what others say and do in community efforts and controversies.

Monolithic Power Structure

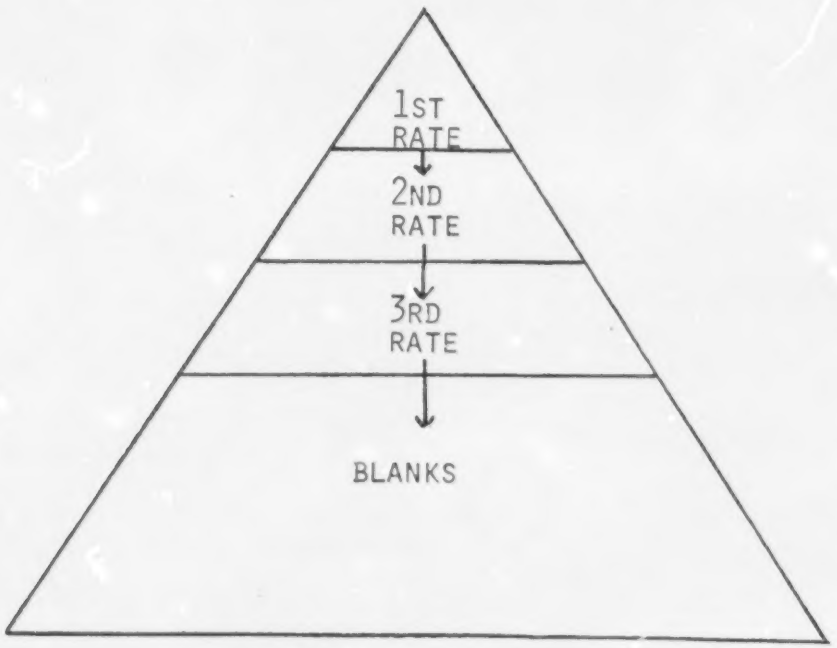
There are many people who believe that community power is structured like a single pyramid, with a few on top who decide while the rest of the people are simply subject to their decisions. In this fairly common view of the community power structure it is assumed:

1. POWER IS THE POSSESSION OF A FEW PEOPLE AT THE TOP,

2. POWER IS CONCENTRATED AND CUMULATIVE AT THE TOP,

3. POWER EMANATES FROM THE TOP AND FLOWS DOWNWARD THROUGH SUCCEEDING LAYERS OF LEADERSHIP.

In graphic terms, this view involves the notion of a monolithic power pyramid, like:



The first rate leaders make the major decisions, and these are carried out through an understructure of leadership layers. The bulk of the population in this view have nothing to do with making decisions; therefore they are blanks as far as power goes. The bulk of the people have no clout in decision making, though the decisions made and carried out through the various layers of leadership might have substantial effect on them.

Those who consider themselves within the leadership hierarchy or expect to be able to use the leadership to further their programs or preferences, often make no ethical defense of this pattern. They just consider themselves realists, and accept that this pattern is pretty much the way things are, and it is wise to accept and use this knowledge of the way things really work to the best advantage. Of course, those who feel they are outside of and unwelcome in the leadership hierarchy and/or feel the leadership works only in its own interest tend to make some ethical judgements about the pattern. They are apt to add a fourth condition related to the power pyramid:

4. POWER CORRUPTS

Whatever the ethical judgments or emotional feeling about the monolithic power structure, those who believe it is reasonably descriptive of the actual pattern of decision making for many or most communities, present it as a picture of:

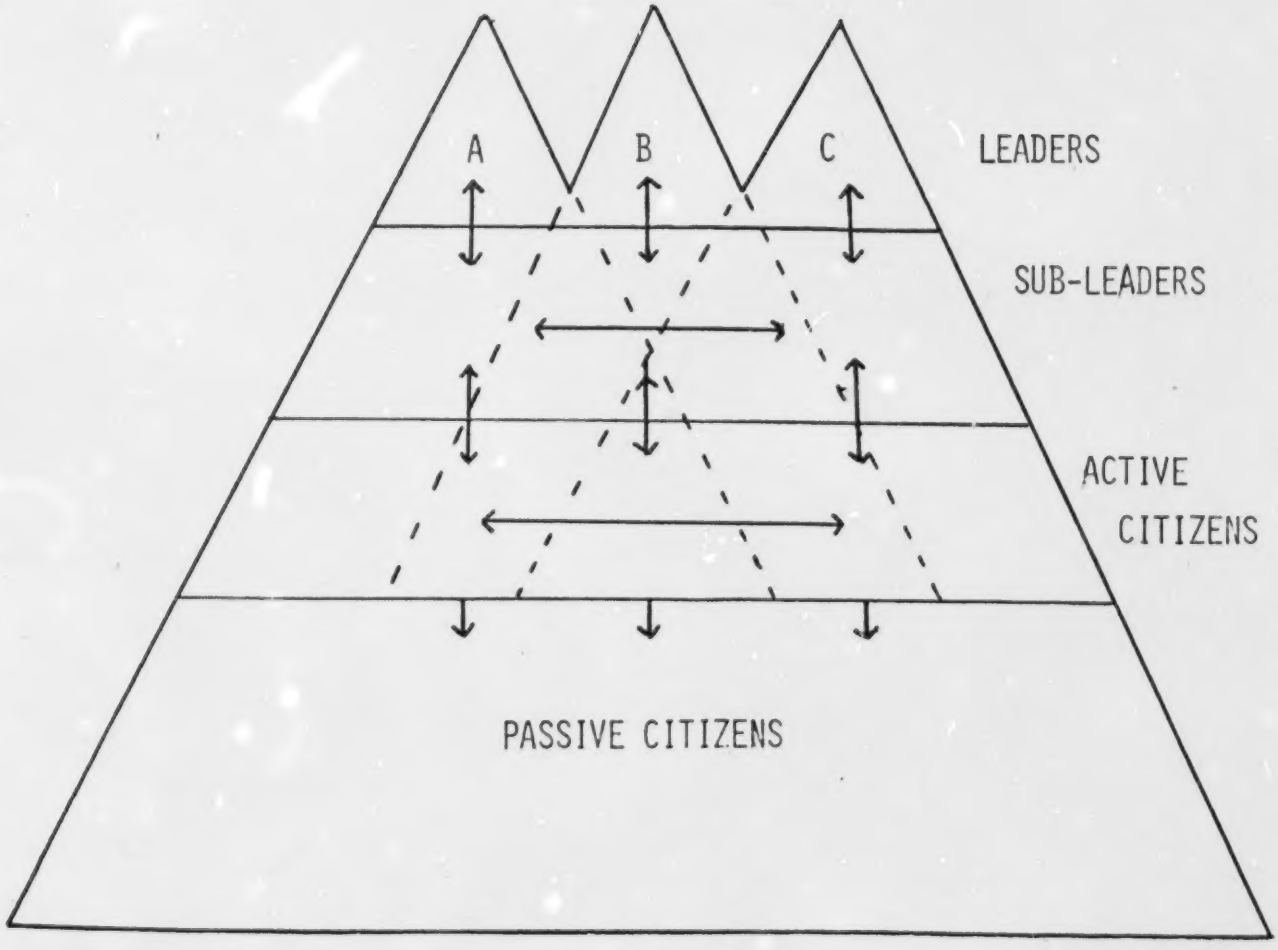
HOW POWER PEOPLE GET THEIR WAY.

Pluralist Power Structure Model

Of course, that is not the only way power structures in American communities are viewed. Another model that has a good number of adherents is the pluralist notion, which differs considerably from the monolithic power concept. For instance, the monolithic view presumes that power is highly concentrated while the pluralist idea is that power is actually highly dispersed. The pluralist model assumes that there are many kinds of resources that could be used to exert influence. This does not imply that resources of influence are anything like equally distributed, nor does it deny that some people and some groups have tremendous resources of influence compared to ordinary people. The model does assume that enough power is spread around among groups, interests and people that no single group of leaders has enough to command the whole community structure. The pluralist idea is usually thought of as descriptive of fairly large communities and of American society as a whole.

The pluralist view often is linked with the ideas of interest group politics and/or competing elites. While it tends to assume almost everybody has some resources for influence, effective influence requires organization and a reasonably high level of organizational activity, so it's only that small minority of highly active people who regularly exert significant influence. Leaders in this view, and to a lesser extent active citizens below the leadership strata, exert a very disproportionate amount of influence compared to their numbers. Still there are many sets of leaders and activists, sometimes cooperating, sometimes competing, who do most of the interacting and influencing in community decision making.

This pluralist's notion does not translate very easily into a nice neat graphic representation, as it is quite complex and dynamic. If the pyramid motif was adapted to capture some of the main features of the pluralist model of the power structure, it would look something like:



There are a number of sets of leaders in this view, with no set having power over the whole structure. They may have some limited area of fairly exclusive influence but in many of the broader issues their areas of influence intersect with other structures. The interactions and efforts at direction and influence are not strictly one direction, though leaders generally have more influence than sub-leaders, and sub-leaders more than active citizens. Because there is competition among interests and segments, there often is need to seek support from wherever it can be found. This makes the power structure fairly open, and even passive citizens at times can become active and exert some level of influence, though as a general rule decisions result from the interactions and transactions up the ladder.

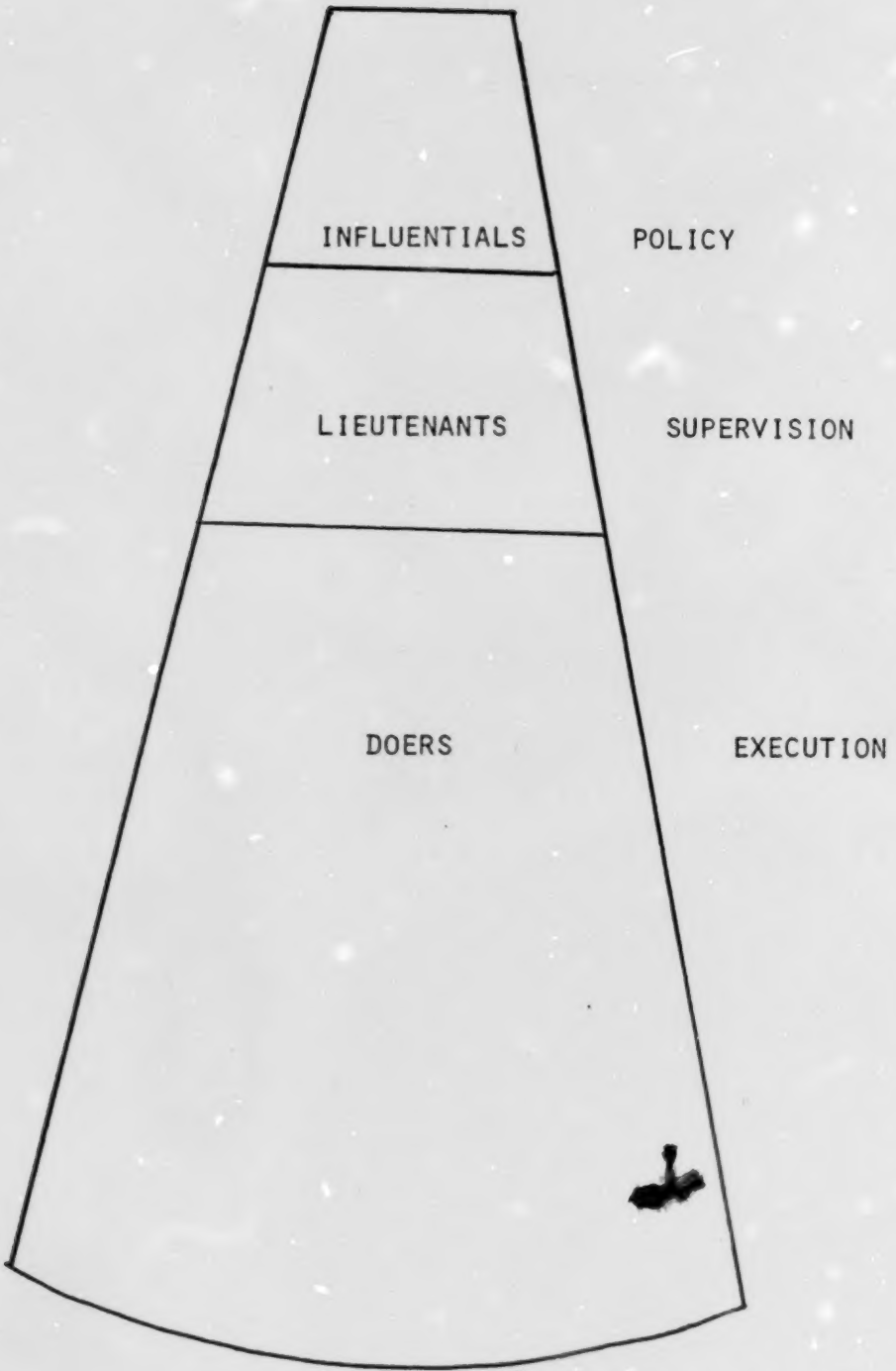
Since any particular set of leaders cannot simply run things the way they like, sometimes leaders lose as well as win. Leaders don't always get their way, so this model is meant to describe:

HOW INTEREST GROUPS (OR LEADERSHIP SETS) INTERACT, AS EACH TRIES TO GET ITS WAY.

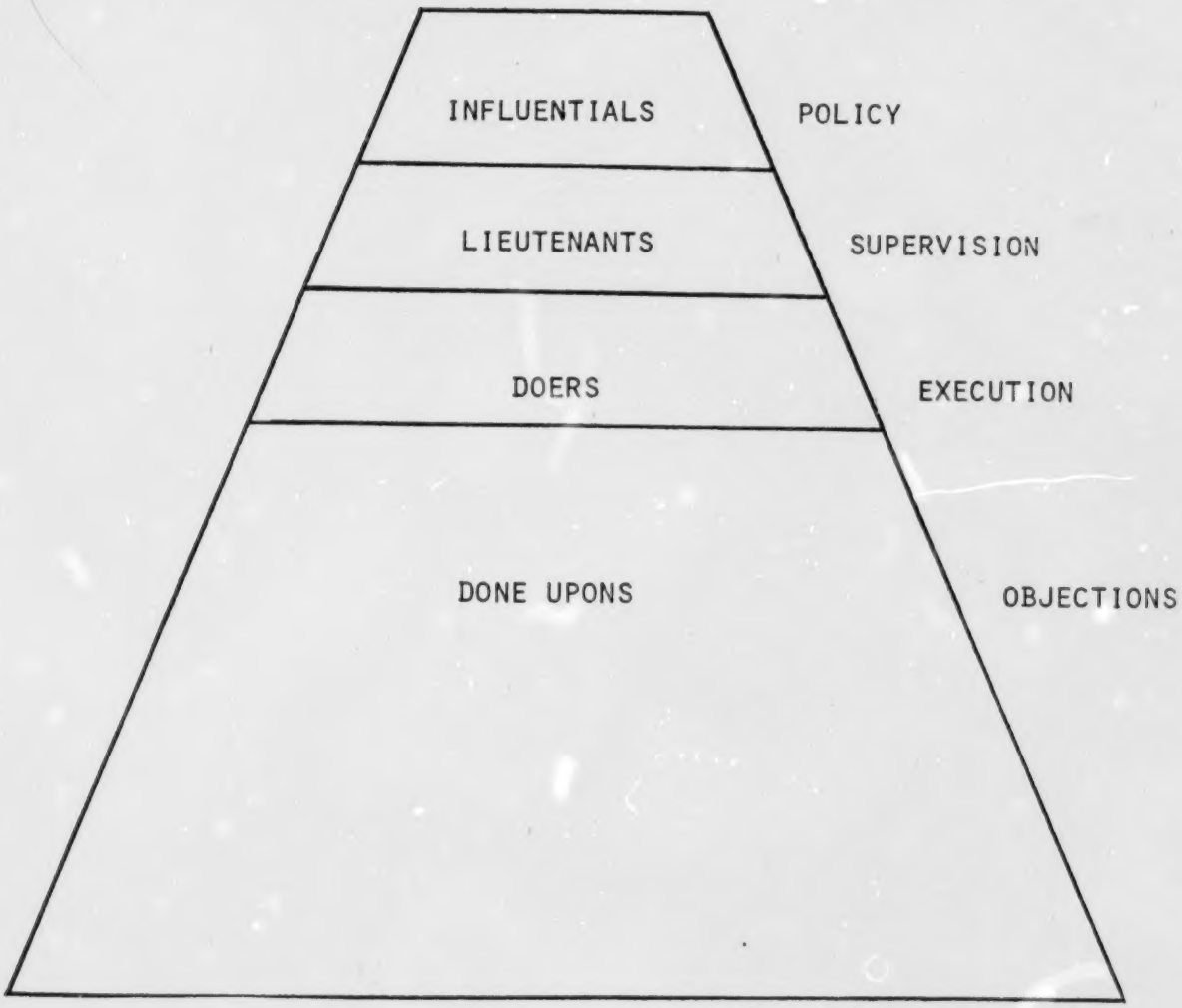
Urban and Rural

These are not the only views of community power structures, but they tend to be the most well known and most used ideas in working out approaches to influence community and public policy. It seems the pluralist model is the most popular in and promoted by political science circles, and most often associated with larger American communities or the situation in "urban" society. The monolithic view tends to be tied closer to rural sociology circles, and picks up an association with the most common pattern in smaller communities or "rural" society. The tendency of association of these ideas about power structure respectively with "urban" and "rural" communities may be more a function of the tradition of the students of power who popularized these two models than the facts of American communities. At any rate, the concept of the monolithic hierarchy of power has been widely disseminated, at least among professionals working in rural areas. There have been a number of variations and elaborations of the power structure idea, and a recognition of the fact that even in small communities there can be a variety of patterns possible. Yet the simple pyramid notion exerts a considerable influence on thinking about the power structure and how things are done in rural communities.

For example, a 1973 publication employed a slight variation of the pyramid pattern to describe the levels of leadership in community decision making.* This publication pictures the "levels of leadership" as:


INFLUENTIALS
POLICY
LIEUTENANTS
SUPERVISION
DOERS
EXECUTION

Policy in this view was determined by the influencials who called on a group of lieutenants to supervise the carrying out of policy by a corps of doers who performed the execution of tasks. There is, however, another element that might be added on to this picture. This addition produces the following variation of the leadership picture:



There is indeed a fairly substantial number of persons who fall in the category of "DONE UPONS" in the process of community decision making. It is this level that serves the function of raising objections to the execution of the doers. This level might raise objection to the policy of the influentials before execution when there was notice of the policy before the lieutenants attempt to supervise the doers in doing it.

Some may choose to ignore that there are people with feelings, ideas, resentments and power below what is considered the leadership level or that those at this level are not important in community decision making; but it may be prudent, as well as democratic, to consider those below leaders as contributors to decisions, and not simply subjects. There is considerable evidence gathering that massive numbers of Americans are growing in the feeling that they are the "done upons" and are not happy with public decision making arrangements that cut out ordinary people or the non-leaders.

A lot of this popular disquiet goes under the label of the crisis of confidence. It may be time to wake up that the suspicion and lack of confidence in how public decisions are made and in many who claim the right to make them is not simply the residue of Watergate. Many Americans don't like the idea that some leaders and educators of leaders think ordinary people are irrelevant to public decision making or the leadership function. As one very significant study in 1973 indicated; many citizens are expressing displeasure at leaders who do not want to bother with citizen involvement, and that:

> THE MANDATE IS FOR PARTICIPATION, NOT DIRECTION, NO MATTER HOW BENEVOLENT OR EXPERT . . . AND THE MESSAGE OBVIOUSLY NOT YET HEARD BY THE LEADERS SURVEYED, IS THAT PEOPLE WANT TO BE INCLUDED AND INFORMED, NOT MANAGED AND IGNORED.**

When considering leadership in rural development, perhaps this statement would serve as a better touch stone, than the common model of the community power structure.

The Problematical

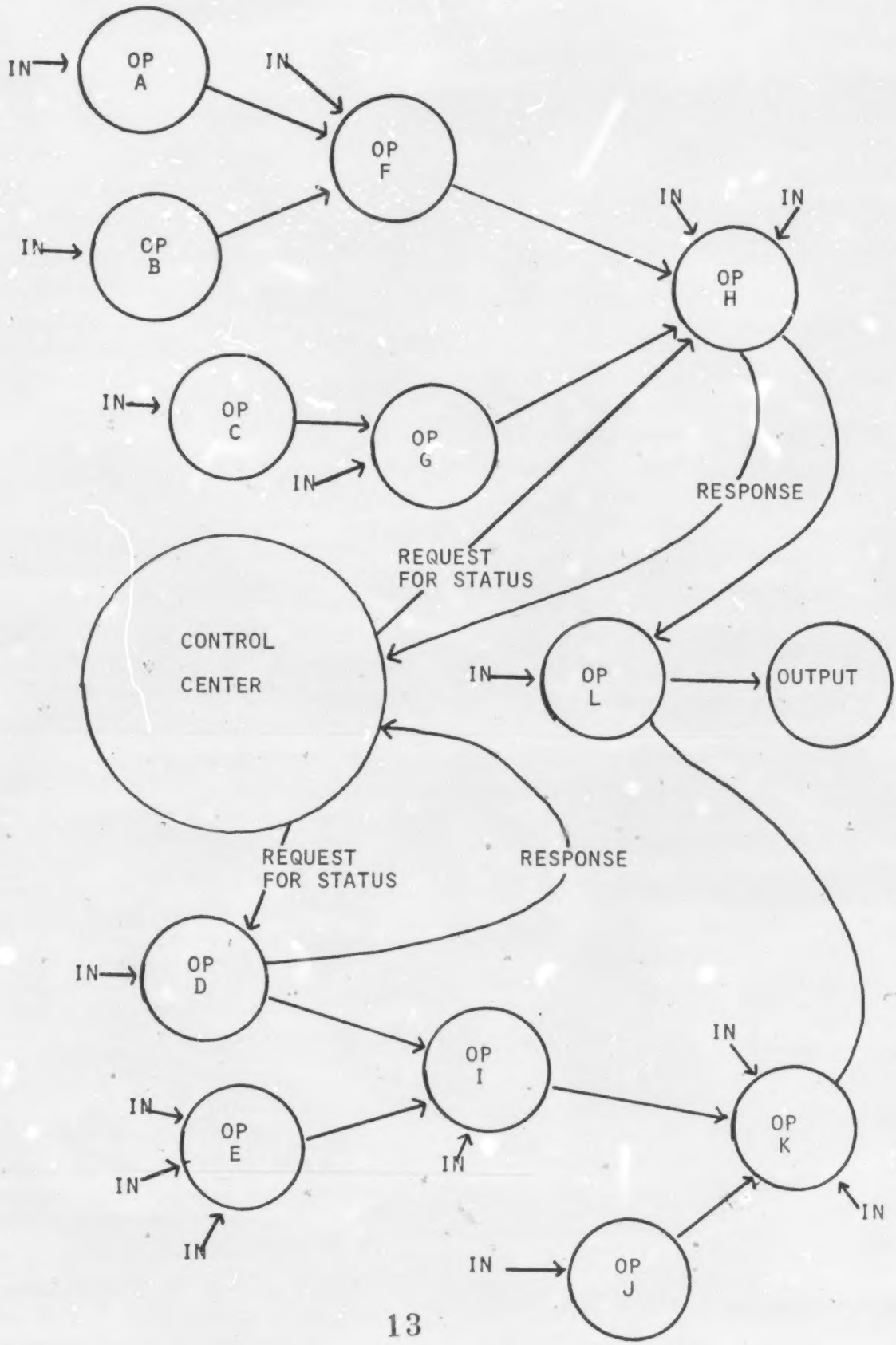
It may be time to update the thinking and approaches to rural development, and every kind of public policy development, for that matter. Instead of thinking the problem is to find the structure that has the power to decide about and implement solutions, perhaps there ought to be concern to develop the broad range of competencies required to deal with the present complexities. It is time that consideration turn, not to finding someone who decides and has policy executed, but to finding the way to effective policies and actions that take the nation where the people want it to go. Rural areas, along with the whole country, are surrounded on every side by the problematical, and to leave the responsibility entirely on the shoulders of the leaders is neither fair to the people nor to the powerful.

There is a truth, particularly relevant in modern times, that, in practice and in our interest to be associated with power figures, can be too easily forgotten. It is simply:

POWERFUL IS NOT THE SAME AS COMPETENT!

This does not imply that leaders, persons in high status positions, or influentials are personally incompetent. It does say that because persons have the power to make decisions or to exert tremendous influence on decisions does not mean they know enough or are able enough to make what will prove to be good and effective decisions.

Today the nation and its communities are involved with complex issues and complicated systems that require many different kinds of operations, many different types of inputs, a wide range of abilities, and decisions at many points in the process. Rather than simple straight line processes, the mode of involvement is in networks that look something like:


IN
OP A
IN
OP F
IN
OP B
IN
IN
OP H
IN
OP C
OP G
IN
RESPONSE
REQUEST FOR STATUS
CONTROL CENTER
IN
OP L
OUTPUT
REQUEST FOR STATUS
RESPONSE
IN
OP D
OP I
IN
IN
OP E
IN
IN
IN
OP K
IN
IN
OP J

The leaders of the control center for the process only get a glimpse at what is going on, and their function is more involved with finding out what is happening and relaying information, than issuing orders. The hierarchy pattern of direction just doesn't fit over complex processes, where decisions are made in all kinds of different operations. Persons in the top positions of authority may know very little or nothing about many of the required operations, which is no problem as long as it is recognized. It is a simple fact of modern life that:

IN COMPLEX MATTERS

NOBODY KNOWS,

NOBODY CAN DO,

ALL THAT IS NEEDED.

With the demands of complex operation, the old way of people at the top simply issuing orders to the understructure does not work, so:

EDICT MANAGEMENT IS OUT.

Our systems work today in a way that everybody is not dependent on a few. Rather the key relationship is:

INTERDEPENDENCE.

All kinds of people have to do their part and to use their judgment if complex processes are to work out. Therefore:

COMPLEX OPERATIONS REQUIRE DIFFUSE COMPETENCE.

Rural development has to be considered a complex process, so there ought to be an expectation that it will be necessary to find, create, and develop competencies all over the place. Thinking in terms of identifying leaders, may be a good deal less productive than:

LOOKING FOR AND USING A VARIETY OF

PEOPLE WITH MANY DIFFERENT ABILITIES,

EXPERIENCES, INTERESTS, AND STYLES.

It was not too long ago that it was assumed that somebody knew what ought to be done, then the problem was to get it implemented. However:

TODAY, THE ANSWER IS NOT FOR SOME

SEGMENT OF THE COMMUNITY TO GET

THE POWER TO ENFORCE ITS PERFORMANCE.

The answer is:

TO DEVELOP A SYSTEM THAT INCLUDES ALL

THE NECESSARY COMPETENCIES.

and the question is:

HOW DO WE DETERMINE THE WAY TO PUT
TOGETHER ALL THAT IS NEEDED TO GIVE
GOOD DIRECTION TO DEVELOPMENT?

Popular tradition suggests that the way is:

THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

For some time many have thought that democracy is just a matter of ordinary people giving their consent to the direction and decisions of the leaders, or the elites (as these people are often labeled). That is a very narrow view of what democracy is all about. Democracy, rather, is an open system in which citizens, if they choose, can take part in the decision making process. It does not mean everybody is actively involved all the time in every public issue or problem. It does mean that no part of the people are cut out from making a contribution when they can and when they choose to try. Democracy does mean that there is no assumption that good judgment, good ideas, good information, and productive energy is the exclusive property of leaders or any particular strata of society. Democracy means people, ordinary as well as extraordinary, have opportunities to contribute to the process of governance, and that means opportunities to do more than consent.

Democracy is complicated and not automatic or easy, but it fits with the demands of giving direction to development, which is complicated and not automatic or easy. To think that there is some simple decision making system that can cope with the complex questions of producing the quality development needed to support the quality of life in rural America is to ignore the complex realities. Some may say that democracy involves too slow, and too inefficient a process to be practical for today. It is not so inefficient as some would indicate, and it is often a good deal more effective than authoritarian approaches, but even if it was not the most efficient way it might be wise.

DEMOCRACY IS A GOOD PROTECTION FROM THE
THREAT THAT SOME SEGMENT OF THE SOCIETY
WILL BE ALLOWED TO DO THE WRONG THINGS
VERY EFFICIENTLY.

There is a lot left to learn about democracy and how to use it as the prime organizational principle in development efforts. Yet it is no time to give up on democracy, just because there are lots of questions and problems in making it work. One thing that might be worth remembering is that employing and enriching the democratic process itself could be the most positive result rural development activities could hope to obtain. The satisfaction and quality of life in the rural areas may depend more on people's opportunities to take part in democratic decision making than finding a few influentials who can be put over projects.

James B. Cook
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February 1976

* John B. Mitchell and Sheldon G. Lowry, "Power Structures Community Leadership and Social Action," North Central Regional Extension Publication No. 35, September, 1973, p.9.

** U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Intergovernmental Relations, Confidence and Concern: Citizens View American Government, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1973, p. 146.